

*"... and of course he'll go into his  
father's business, when he grows up."*

15118.

# THE BRITISH CHARACTER

STUDIED AND REVEALED

BY

PONT

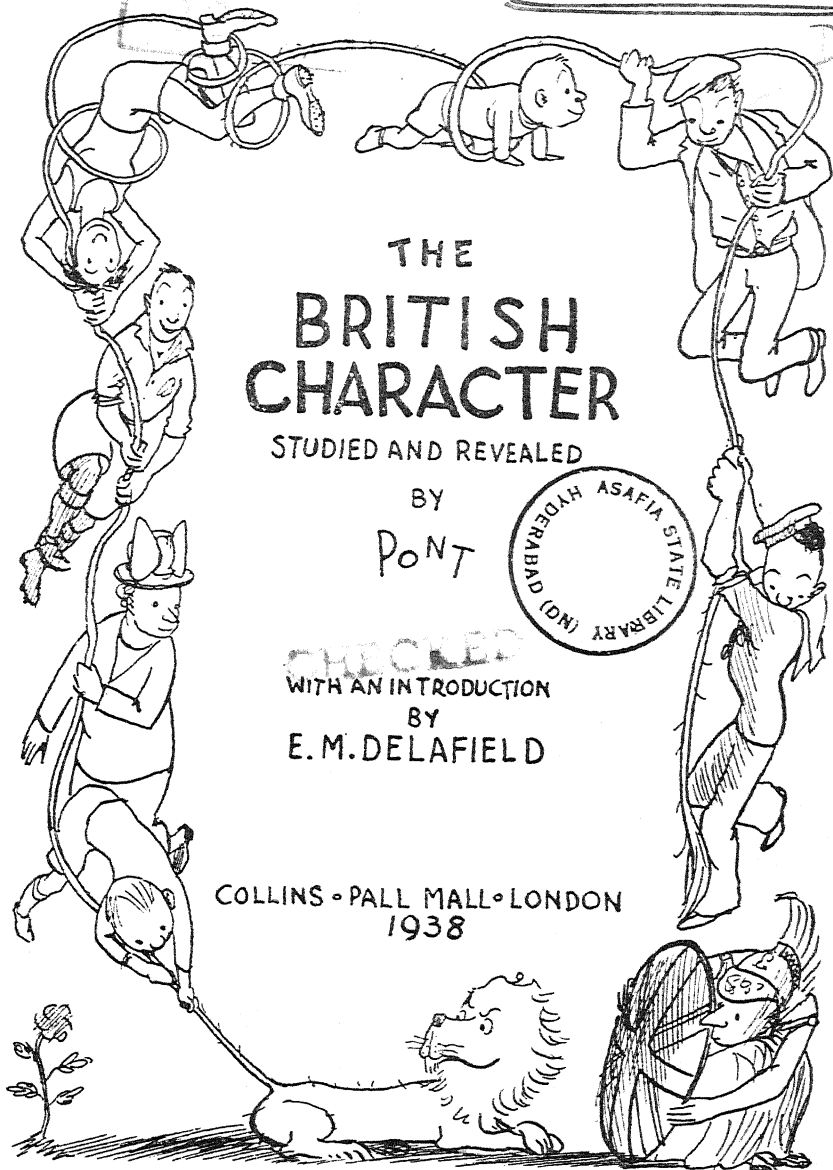


WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

E. M. DELAFIELD

COLLINS • PALL MALL • LONDON  
1938



Checked

THIS BOOK IS SET IN FONTANA, A NEW TYPE  
FACE DESIGNED FOR THE HOUSE OF COLLINS,  
AND PRINTED BY THEM IN GREAT BRITAIN

First Impression  
Second Impression  
Third Impression

September, 1938  
November, 1938  
December, 1938

914.2

PON

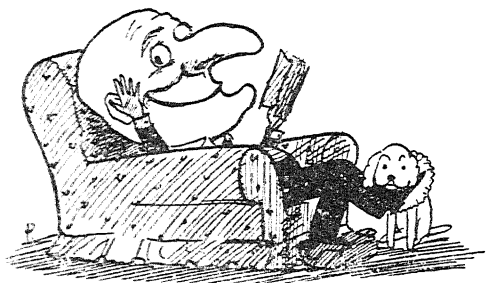
Acc. No.	15118
Class No.	G.28.
Book No.	248

COPYRIGHT

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION <i>by</i> E. M. DELAFIELD	<i>page</i> 7
FOREWORD	" 13
BREEDING	" 15
THE ARTS	" 27
THE EMPIRE SPIRIT	" 35
LOVE OF ANIMALS	" 47
DOMESTIC	" 53
SOCIAL SENSE	" 67
RURAL	" 83
TRAVEL	" 95
SPORT	" 109





THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THIS BOOK  
ARE REPRODUCED FROM 'PUNCH'  
BY PERMISSION OF THE PROPRIETORS

# INTRODUCTION

by

E. M. Delafield

It has been well said—by myself, as it chances—that every Englishman is an average Englishman: it's a national characteristic.

What is more, no true Englishman would wish it to be otherwise. He prefers his neighbour to be an average Englishman—he prefers to be one himself. He likes what he knows. The humour of Pont's drawings will appeal to him enormously, I hope and believe—but that appeal will mostly lie in the fact that he recognises every situation portrayed as a thoroughly familiar one. His friends, his relations, and himself have all experienced those "tendencies" so trenchantly depicted by the artist, and have reacted to them in precisely the same way. He can therefore enjoy himself *without having to think*.

For if there is one peculiarity in the British character that is more marked than another, it is this aversion from thought.

At this stage I must digress, briefly, to say that if I *have* a fault to find with this book, it is that it was not called *The English*, rather than *The British Character*. My own remarks will be entirely confined to the former, and will include neither the Scottish, the Irish, the Welsh, nor the far-flung denizens of the British Empire. Quite a number of these are as ready as possible, for instance, to think

—wrongly, no doubt, on the part of the Irish, whimsically—which is worse—on the part of the Scots, and unintelligibly on the part of the Welsh.

But to return to the English.

To think is no part of their character. Instead of thoughts, the English have traditions.

The tradition of the Home, for instance.

Even the French—a volatile and irreverent race, with no marked bias in favour of Albion—have preferred not to translate this word, but to recognise it as unalterably English in origin and spirit by referring to it as “le home.”

Yet how do the English treat “le home”—that is, theoretically and traditionally, the backbone of their country?

Their first care is to remove their children from it by sending them to boarding-school almost as soon as they can walk, and keeping them there until they are old enough to be sent still farther away.

Their next is to avoid the proximity of their relations. Unlike the Latin races, the English seldom keep a widowed mother-in-law, an unmarried sister and a couple of canaries on the top floor, an asthmatic uncle and his housekeeper on the third, and a centenarian cousin in a little room behind the kitchen.

They speak, write and sing of Home Sweet Home, and by this means have built up the tradition that it is a thoroughly English institution. Once tradition is firmly established, the thing is done.

The danger of having to think is practically eliminated.

Another tradition that is rooted not only in our

own soil, but in the minds of the rest of the world, is the devotion of the English to animals. Certainly, they will speak affectionately to and of their dogs and horses, which is more than they will do concerning their friends and family—but between the dogs and horses and the rest of the brute creation a sharp line has been drawn. The fox, the deer, the badger, the otter, the pheasant, and many others would have but little to say in praise of the animal-loving English, were they consulted. Even the domestic cat is, for the most part, only viewed as an inferior kind of dog, its sole virtue being that it will—like its owners—kill other, smaller animals.

But by dint of never thinking about it, the English firmly believe themselves to be the only nation on earth that is really kind to its animals.

Indeed, the power of self-delusion possessed by our singular race is almost phenomenal, the more so because it cannot be called the product of imagination, for the English neither possess, nor wish to possess, any imagination at all. They only possess, to a very high degree, the quality of faith as defined by the schoolboy : Believing what you know to be untrue.

A very brief list of such beliefs comes to one's mind almost automatically.

Most Englishmen, if forced into analysing their own creeds—which Heaven forbid—are convinced that God is an Englishman—probably educated at Eton.

That all good women are naturally frigid.

That any change in the British Constitution would be for the worse.

That England is going to rack and ruin.

That England is the finest country in the world.

That all foreigners are slightly mad.

That any one disagreeing on any of these points ought to be shot.

The beliefs of Englishwomen are confined to the more domestic problems of life.

That all men are just like children.

That it is better to be dodgy than smart.

That listening to the wireless is meritorious but reading a novel is waste of time.

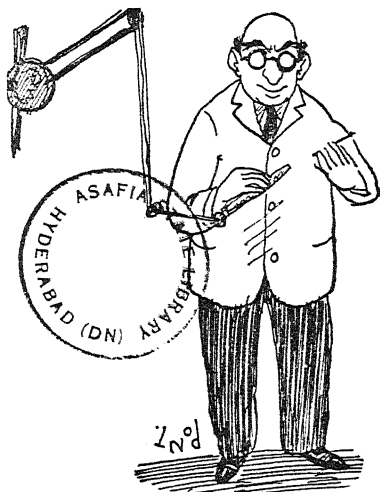
That a Sale is a place where goods can be obtained for less money than they are really worth.

That children are a blessing to their parents.

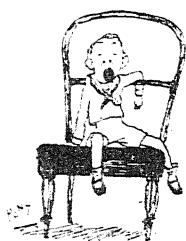
Enough has now perhaps been said to show that the English, whatever else they may be, are agreeably inconsistent. (Unfortunately, it was an American who first wrote: Dare to be inconsistent.)

It will be part of our English inconsistency, to enjoy Pont's delightful presentations of our national life, to point out to one another how very true it all is, and to continue, unmoved, in our ways.

E. M. D.



*"Now, I want you to be particularly  
brave about the next part."*



## FOREWORD

A BOOK of drawings, composed of nothing but drawings, will lie upon the tables of the booksellers, thumbed but unsold until Doomsday. The customers will pick it up, but after they have looked at the drawings the customers will put the book back on the table and spend the precious shillings on SOMETHING TO READ. My agent told me this and the publisher said it was so, so there can be no doubt about it at all.

"A high standard of literary ability will not be expected in the artist," said the agent, kindly but pointedly. So the artist, with a heavy heart, hired a typewriter at half a crown a week, and in the intervals of watching the seasons change beyond the window, produced the six literary effects which will be found scattered about this book. It is hoped that these effects, rising before the eyes of possible purchasers in the form of visions of printed words, will have the result that the agent and the publisher expect.

*Pont.*

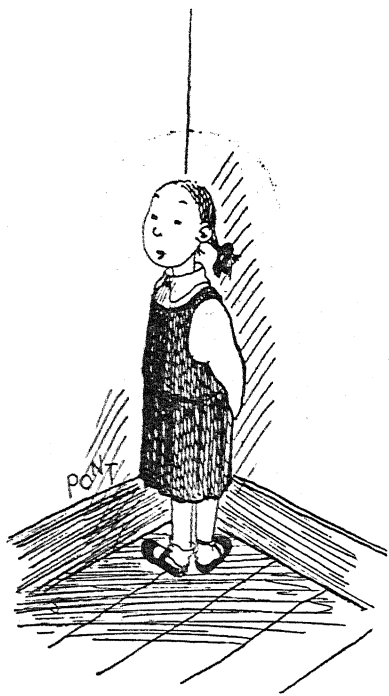




## BREEDING



*"It's YOUTH you need in a business like yours, Mr. Zinkbaum.  
Youth, with its imagination, drive and enthusiasm."*



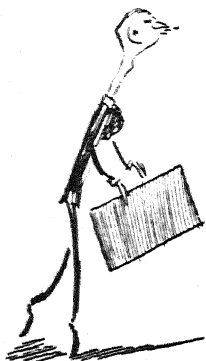
*"We all have to make mistakes  
sometimes, Miss Heslop."*

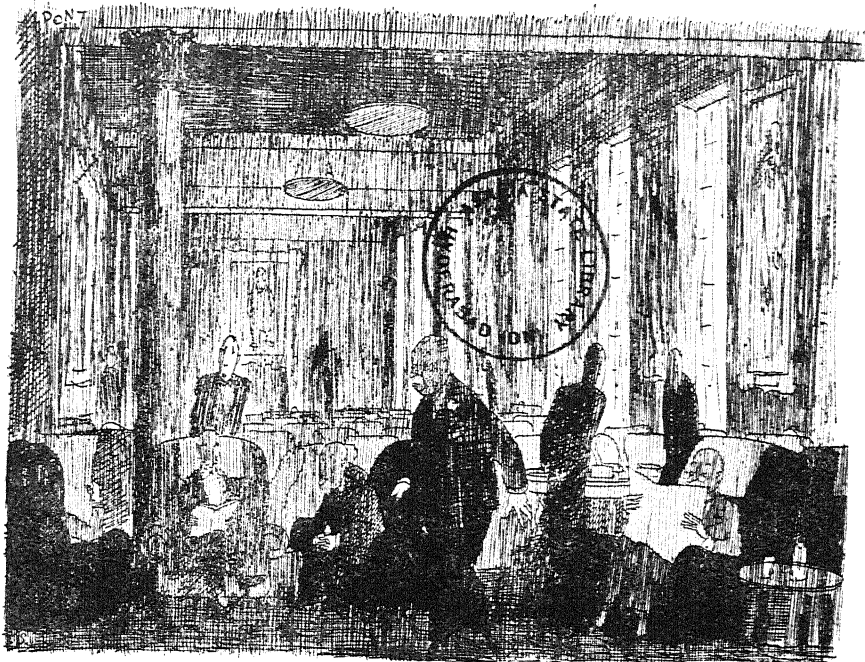


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF BREEDING.

## THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

THE British, with their tidy minds,  
Divide themselves up into kinds.  
The common kind they call the masses,  
The better kind—the upper classes.  
In either case it's really not  
A specially inspiring lot.  
The common ones play darts in pubs,  
The others slowly die in clubs.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ENJOYMENT OF CLUB LIFE.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
TENDENCY NOT TO KNOW WHAT TO DO ON  
SUNDAYS.



## NUMBER TEN DOWNING STREET

THE Prime Minister was busy in his study  
Attending to some very serious things,  
When suddenly the telephone on table  
Gives off a most disturbing lot of rings.

The statesman for a moment is quite flustered,  
And can't think what it is he ought to do,  
But finally he picks up the receiver  
And says: "Hallo there! What's that? Oh! It's *you!*"

"Why, yes," he says in answer to some question,  
"I'm Prime Minister of England all right,  
Yes, I'm the man who guides the British people  
And steers their ship of something through the night."

But after that his manner seems to alter,  
He has the air of some one quite upset;  
He says, "I really cannot answer that one,  
And I'm not prepared to discuss National Debt.

"It isn't in the interests of the Nation,  
So it's really not the slightest bit of good  
Your asking me to answer all those questions—"  
And rings off muttering, "Couldn't, if I would."

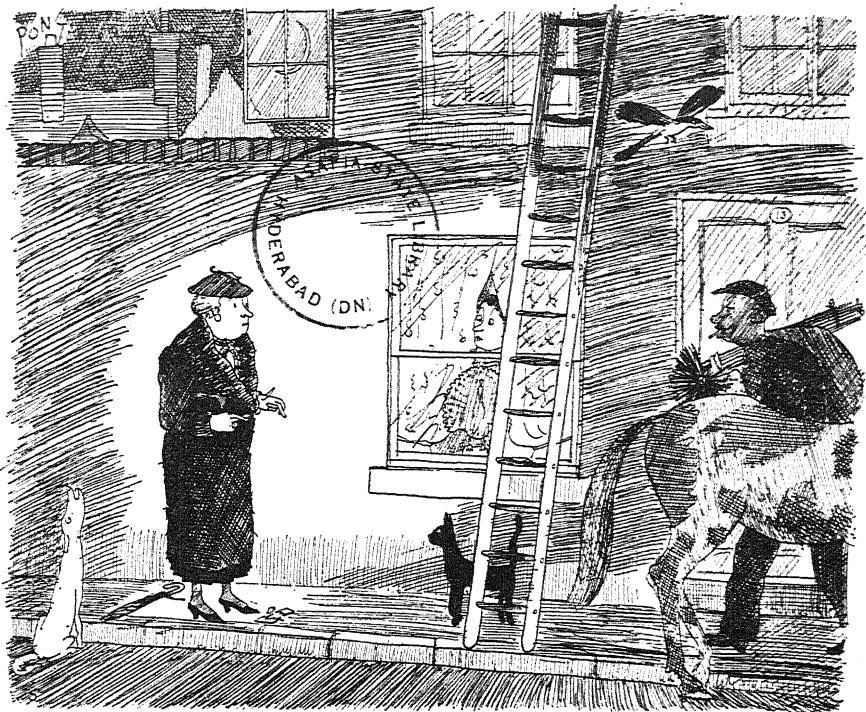


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
POLITICAL APATHY.

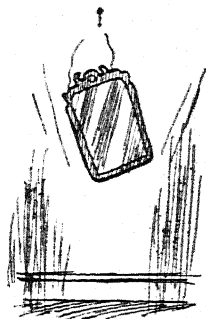


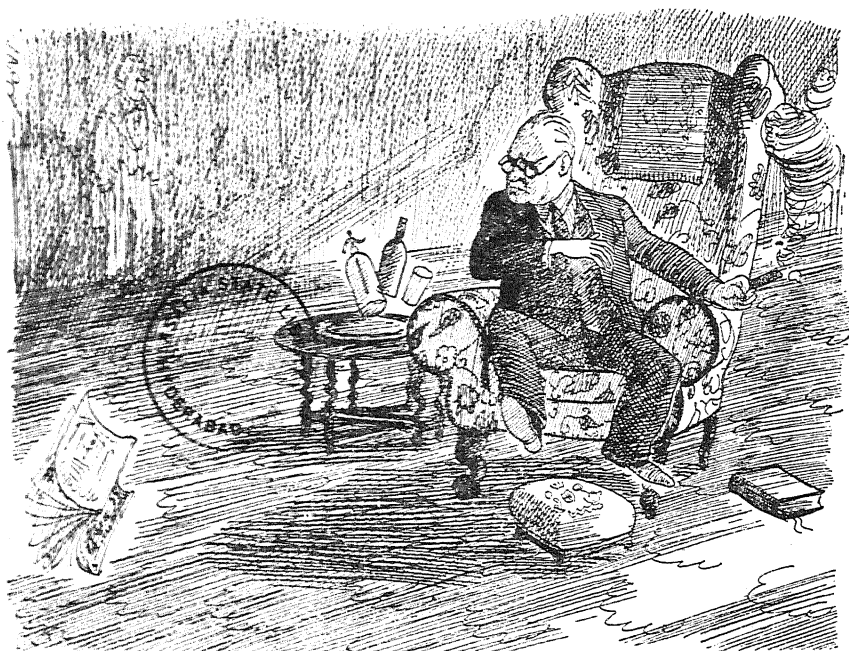


*"To be perfectly frank, my dear lady,  
no, I can't hear a 'funny humming noise.'"*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
PRONENESS TO SUPERSTITION.





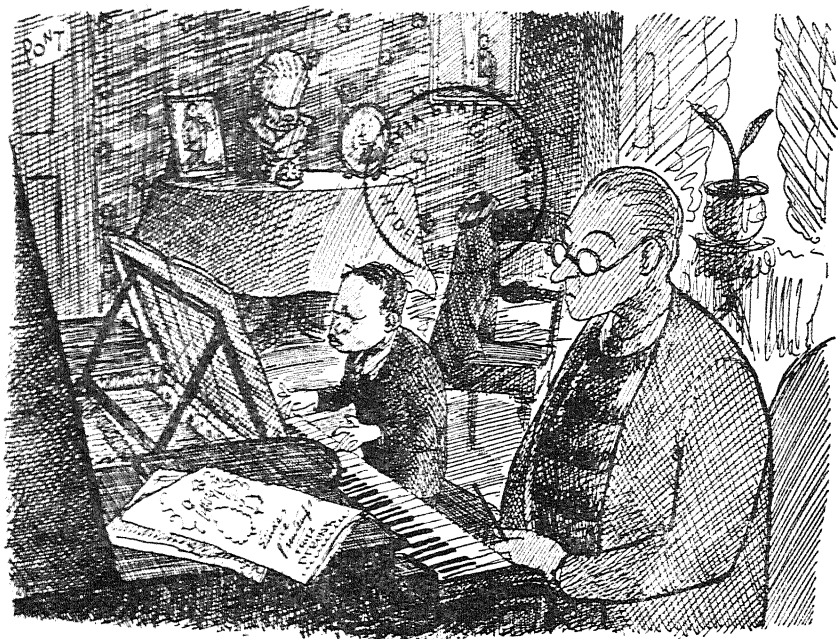
### THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

A TENDENCY TO THINK THINGS NOT SO GOOD AS THEY USED  
TO BE.

## THE ARTS

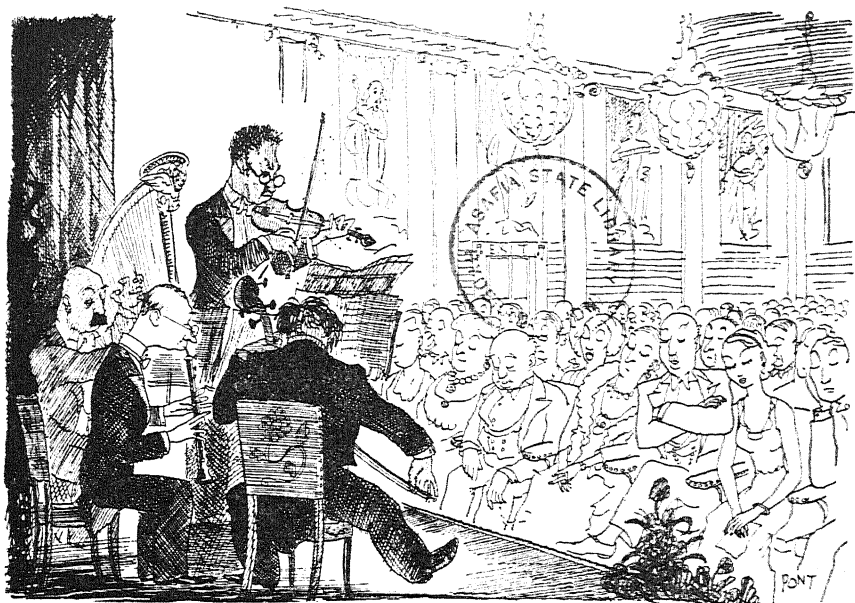


*“Once more into the breach, dear friends,  
once more . . .”*

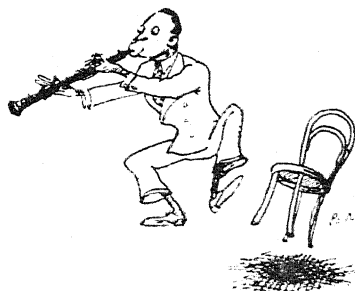


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
TENDENCY TO LEARN THE PIANO WHEN YOUNG.

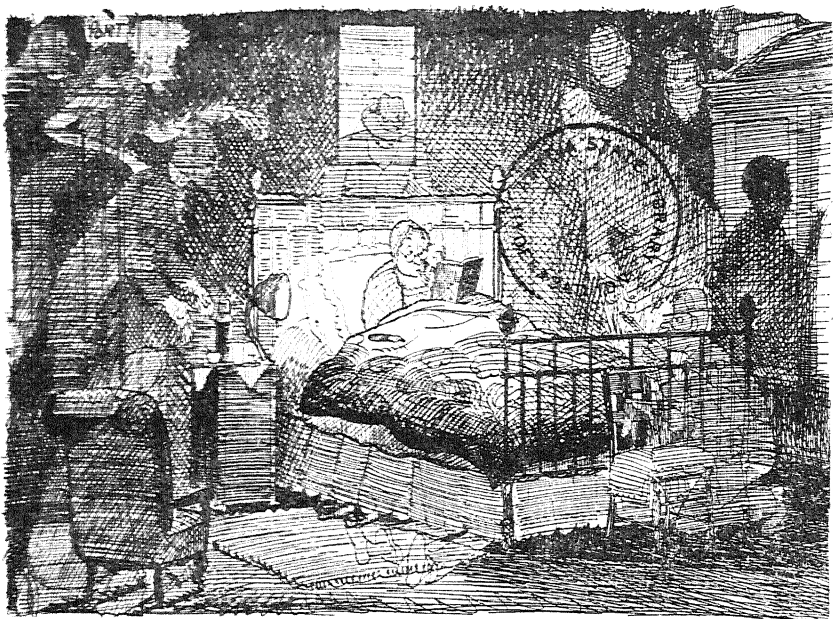




THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
FAILURE TO APPRECIATE GOOD MUSIC.

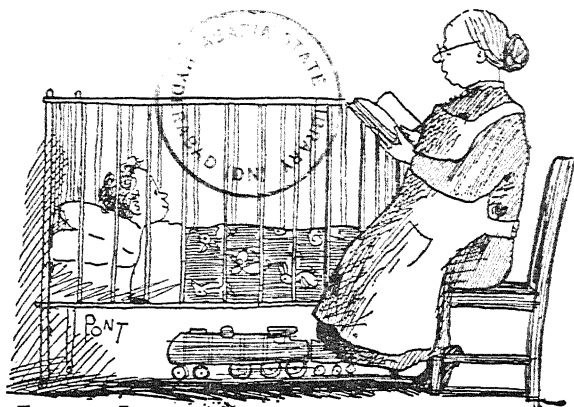






THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF DETECTIVE FICTION.





... "This looks to me like 'Dead-Face' Anderson's work," gasped Detective-Inspector Watkins eyeing the corpse in the bath. ..."

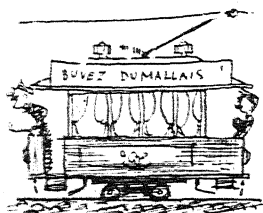


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF ARRIVING LATE AT THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS.

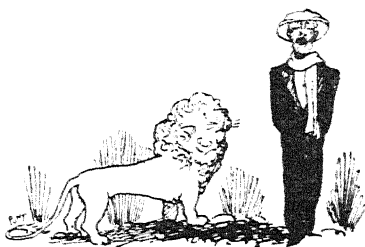




THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
THE GIFT FOR WATER COLOURS.



# THE EMPIRE SPIRIT



## LINES

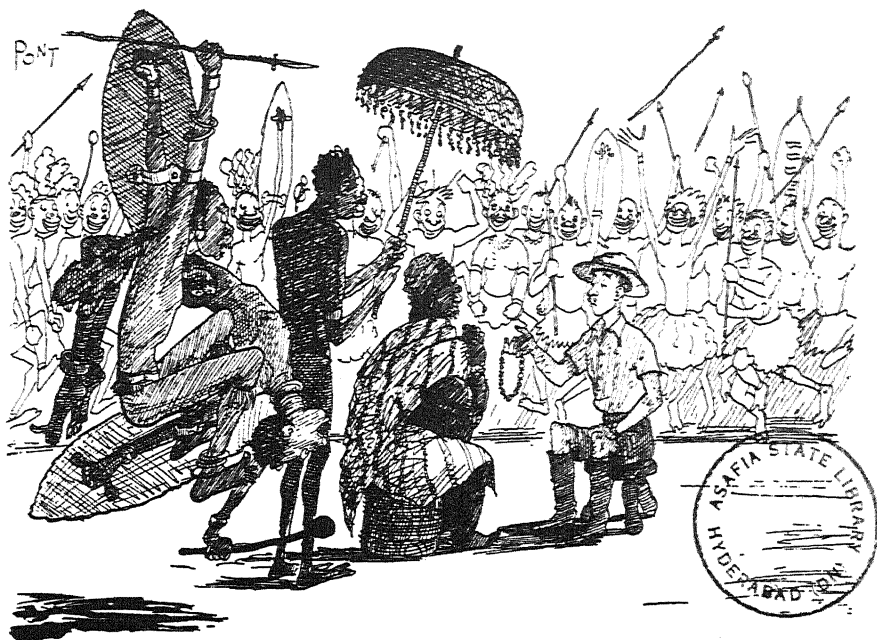
FROM Afric's steaming Jungles  
To India's arid Plains  
The Natives are dependent  
Upon the White Man's Brains.

It is the White Man's Duty,  
As everybody knows,  
To teach the black to feel ashamed  
And then to sell him cloes.

Instead of letting him exist  
Just how and where he pleases,  
We teach him how to live like Us  
And die of Our Diseases.

We move him from his valleys  
To airy mountain-tops  
Where he won't undermine his health  
By raising herds and crops.

The most disturbing nightmare  
Which haunts each White Man's son  
Is: "If there had been no White Men  
What *would* the Blacks have done?"



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
APTITUDE FOR BUILDING EMPIRES.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
REFUSAL TO ADMIT DEFEAT.



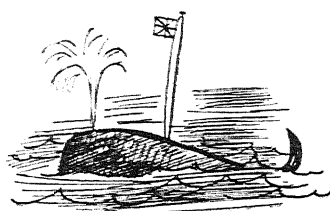


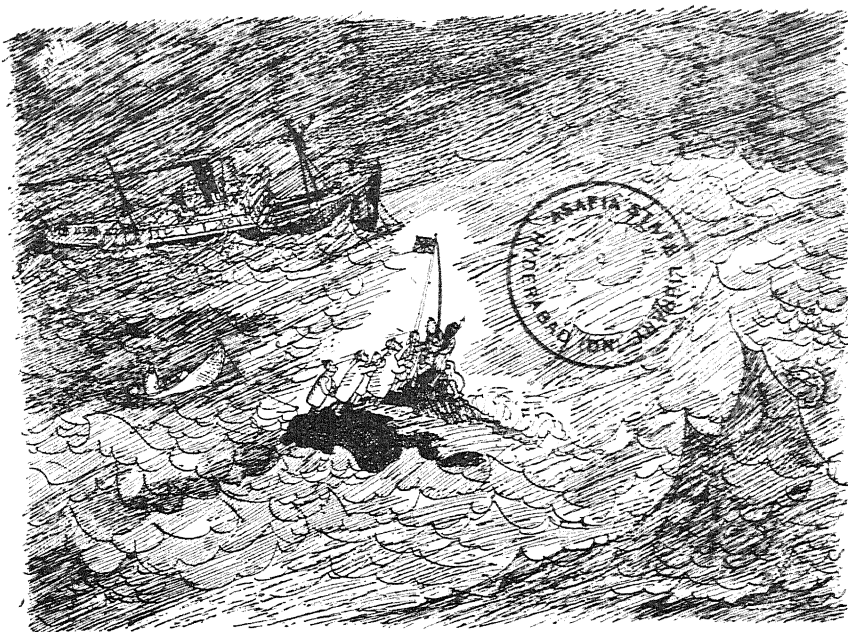
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF NOT BEING AN ALIEN.





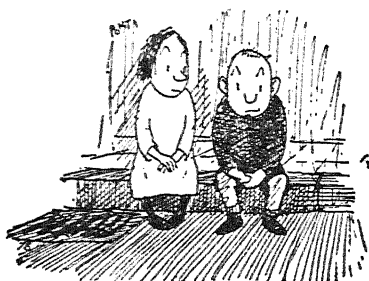
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ADAPTABILITY TO FOREIGN CONDITIONS.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

IMPERIALISM.



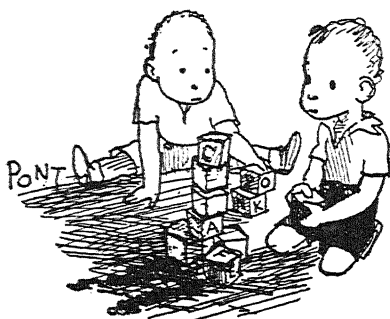
*"Of course we must face facts.  
It's going to mean waiting."*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF KEEPING CALM.

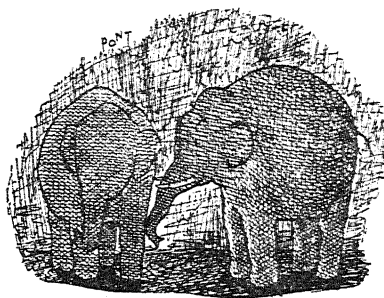






*"There are times when I really begin to  
wonder if all this is worth while."*

## LOVE OF ANIMALS



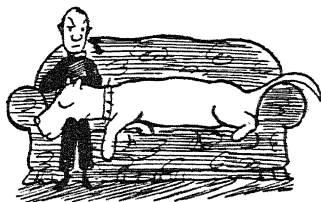
*"What about you and me and  
a little home?"*

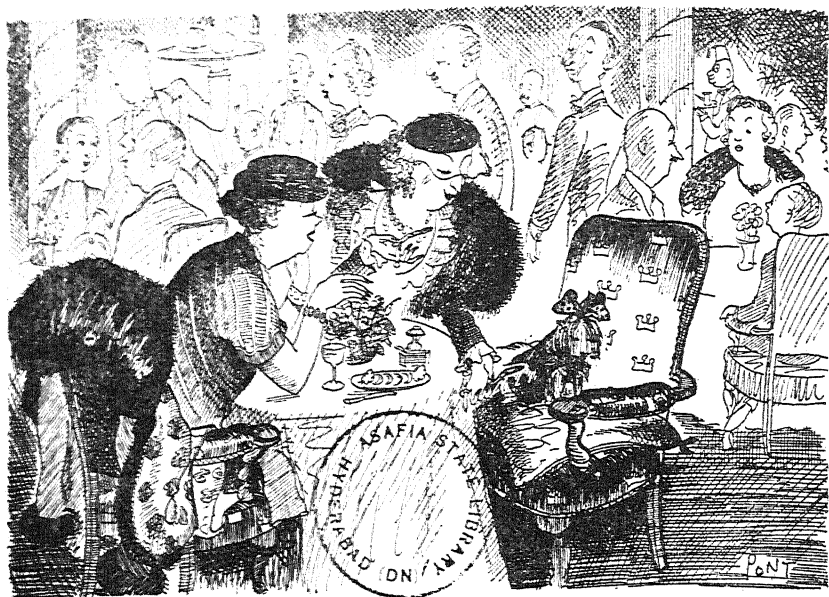


*"Sometimes I think they understand  
every word we say!"*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
STRONG TENDENCY TO BECOME DOGGY.





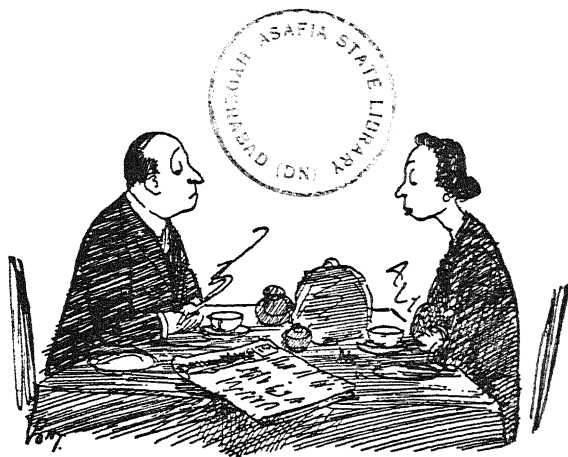
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF DUMB ANIMALS.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF WRITING LETTERS TO 'THE TIMES.'

## DOMESTIC

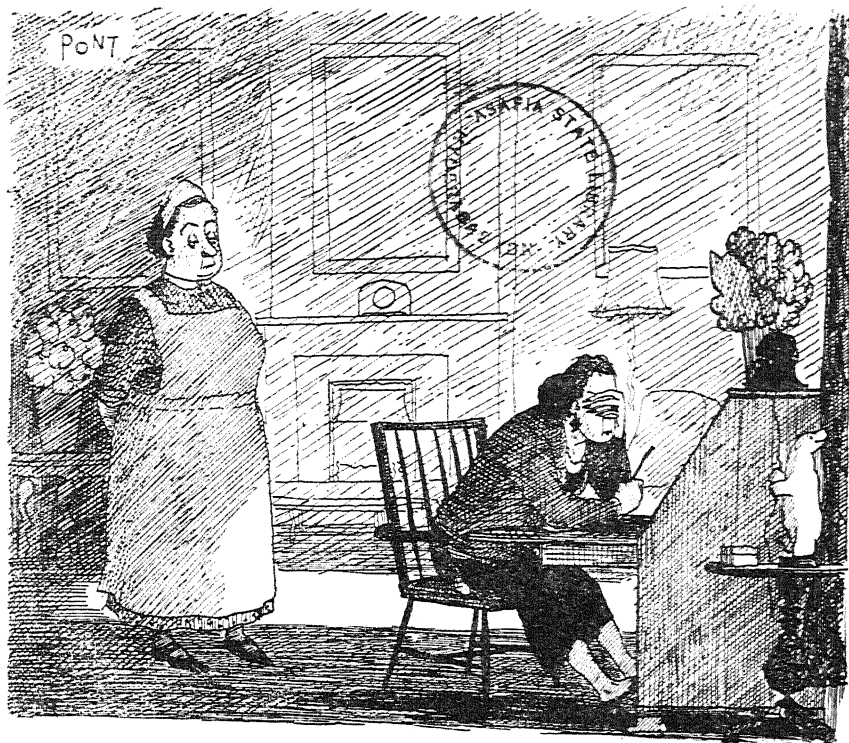


*"And, now, will you open it or shall I?"*

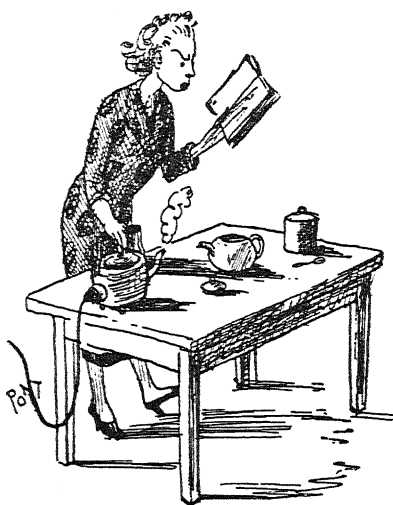




*"There will be nineteen extra to  
lunch to-day."*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ABSENCE OF IDEAS FOR MEALS.



*... then pour the boiling water out  
of the kettle into the teapot.*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ABSENCE OF THE GIFT FOR COOKING.

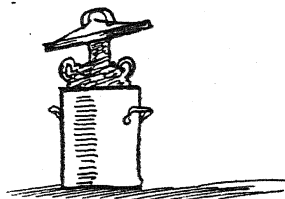


## short story in the new manner

. . . the old carpet sweeper . . . three pieces . . . all in bits . . . what on earth did we ever buy that for . . . if i shut my eyes i can see kingscrossstation . . . i wonder why that is . . . somebody told me once . . . i must think . . . no time to think . . . through the trapdoor i can see janet with the featherduster but if i shut my eyes i can see kingscrossstation . . . hullo janet *there* you are . . . hullo mum *there you* are . . . now then janet ive spokentoyouaboutthatbefore . . . let us throw all these things out of the skylight . . . but not that or these and certainly not that i bought it the year freddie felldownthestairs mrs henry tuddy . . . mrs henry tuddy . . . oh yes i remember now the woman with the arms . . . if i shut my eyes now i can see mrs tuddys arms . . . what exceptionally fine arms mrs tuddy had . . . the boxes might come in useful janet . . . i said the boxes might come in yes in . . . idiot the girl is . . . i wonder what she did to have suchveryfinearms . . . no janet i said these things in this trunk look like something-orothers palms . . . palms . . . PALMS . . . why mum they look more to me like your old fur coat . . . that is exactly what they are janet . . . dear mrs tuddy . . . i have been wondering all day . . .



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF NEVER THROWING ANYTHING AWAY.





*"Don't trouble, George, dear, I can  
manage quite well without it."*



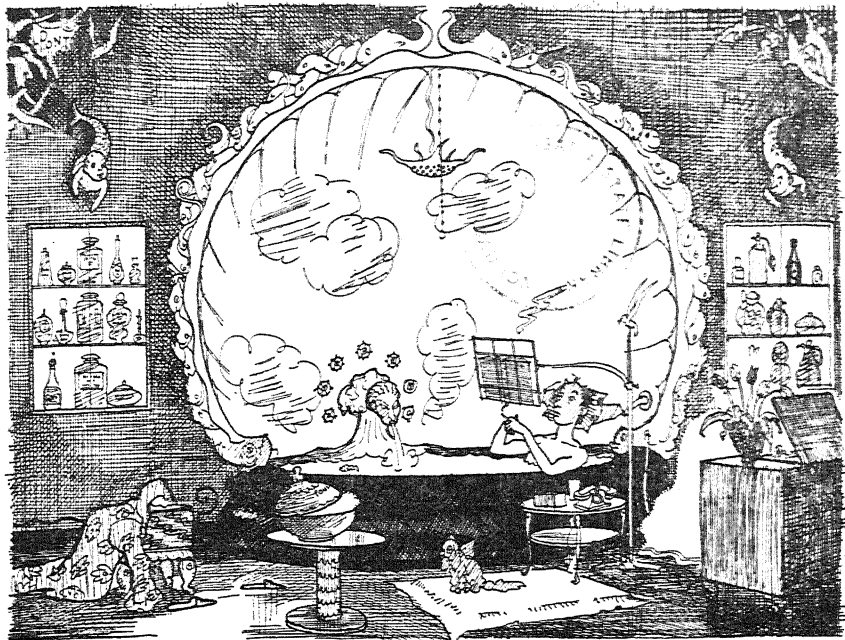
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

A TENDENCY TO PUT THINGS AWAY SAFELY.



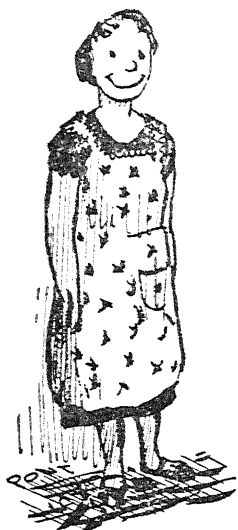


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ABSENCE OF ENTHUSIASM FOR ANSWERING LETTERS.

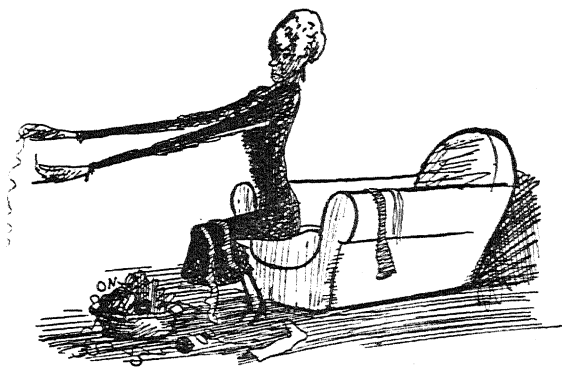


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
THE EXALTATION OF CLEANLINESS.

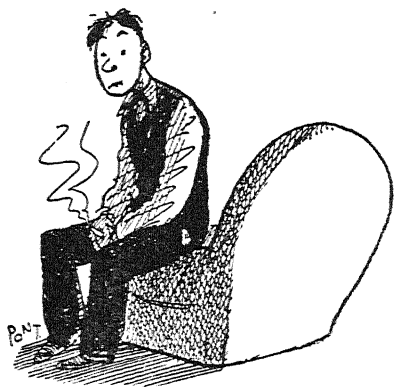




*"I expect that was to-day's I was  
lighting the fire with, sir."*

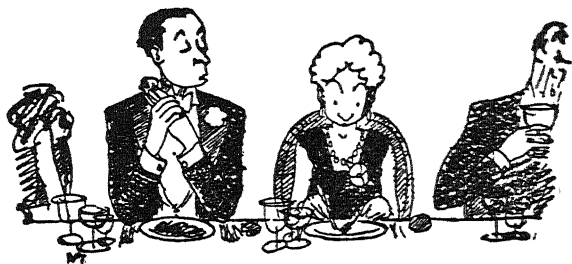


*"It's quite all right, dear, I can manage perfectly well without them—honestly I can."*



*"I've just been wondering, dear, if I  
don't prefer the piano in the upstairs  
room after all."*

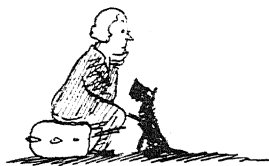
## SOCIAL SENSE



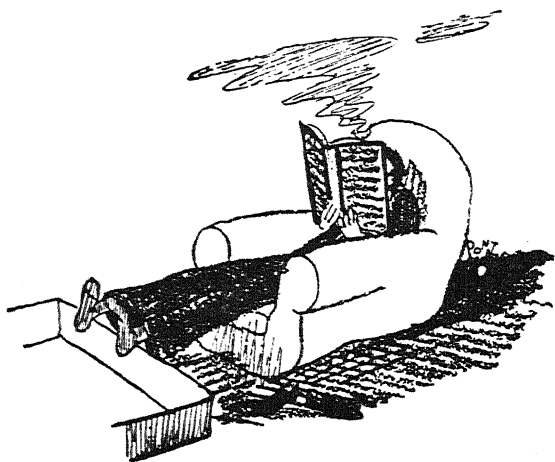
*"Well, and what can you talk about?"*



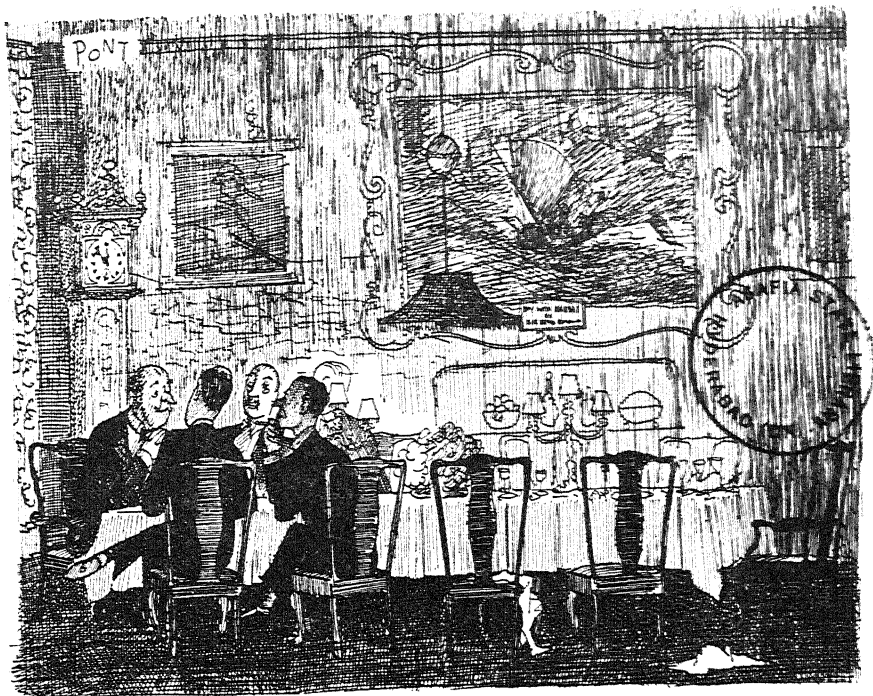
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ATTITUDE TOWARDS HOSTESSES.



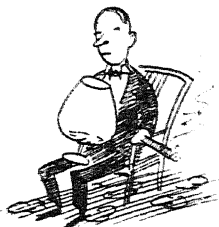




*"I was just saying, darling, that I see  
Clark Gable is on to-night."*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
A TENDENCY NOT TO JOIN THE LADIES.



## MENU

### *Luncheon.*

Broth de l'Ecosse

Filet de Sole Fried

Bœuf Roti avec Pudding de Yorkshire

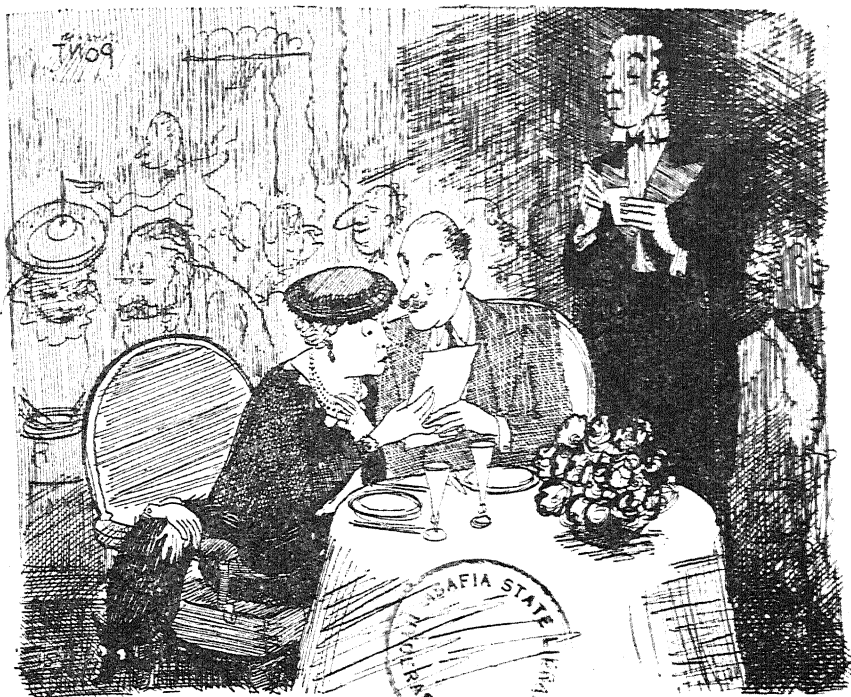
Pommes de Terre Baked

Sprouts de Brussels

Pomme Tart et Whipped Cream

Café 6d. extra

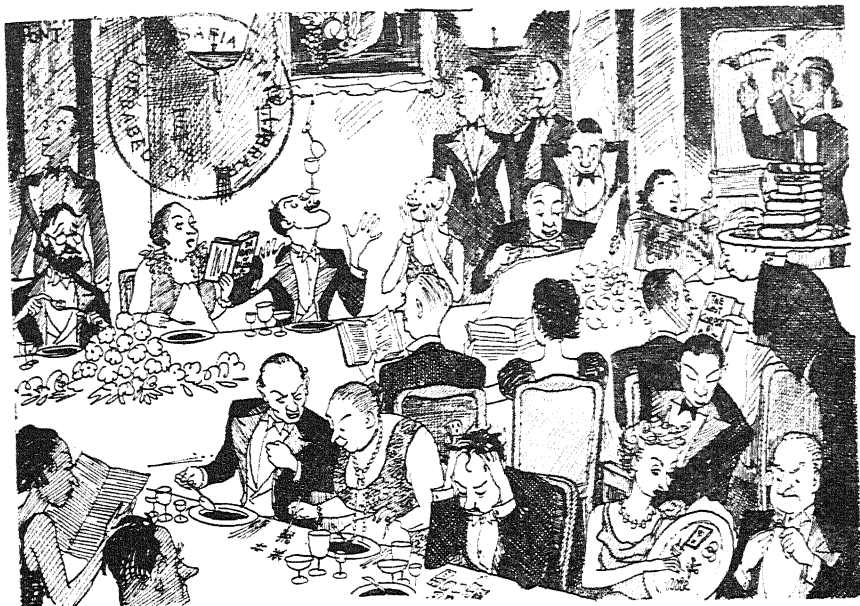




THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF EVERYTHING FRENCH.



*" . . . and the doctors all said they'd never  
seen one like it."*

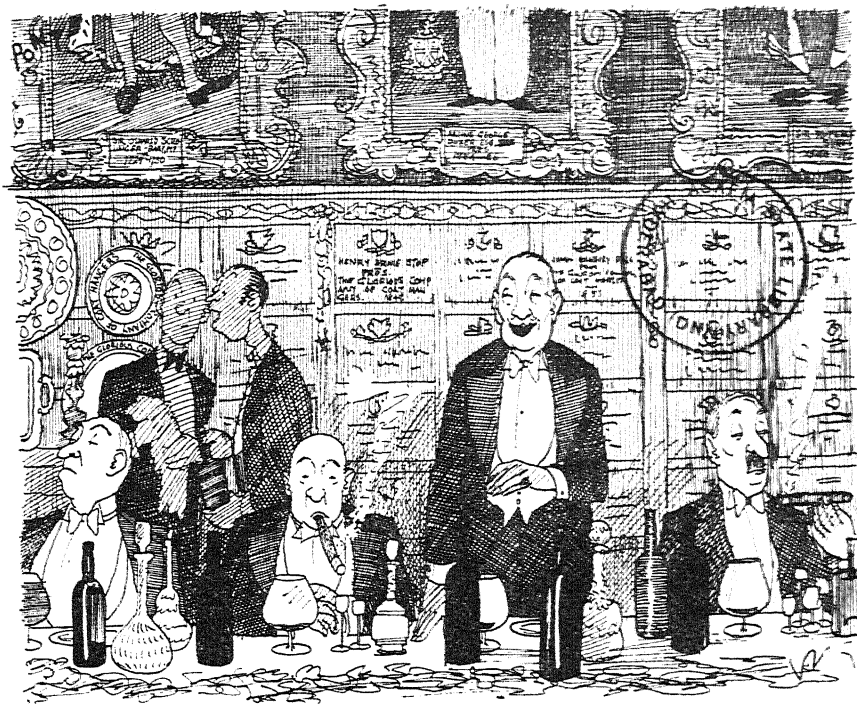


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ABSENCE OF THE GIFT OF CONVERSATION.

## WILD DUCK

I REMEMBER a little incident that occurred when I was a young man. I was very young and quite ingigulous, don't you know. It didn't strike me as being at all funny at the time, but I must admit that since then I have had many a good laugh about it. Ha! Ha! It happened that one afternoon I was on my way to a friend's house. I must explain that he had invited me; sent a message in fact. And also that at one time he was considered by Lord Hippleton to be the finest Tramusher of his day, but so far as I know nobody plays the game nowadays.

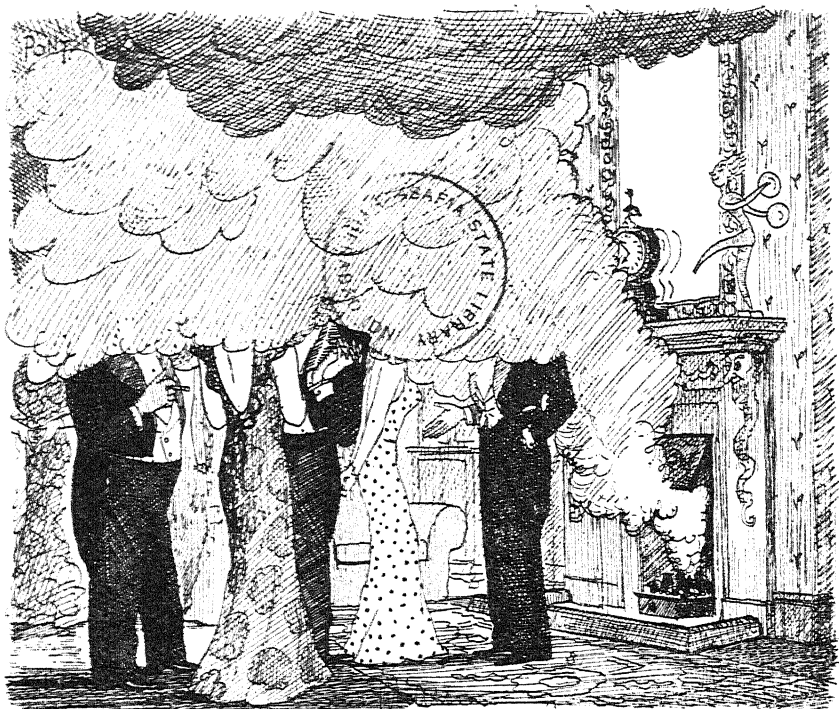
Well, anyway, he became chief assistant commissioner at Rangoon eventually, and a very fine show he put up too. "Old Jithers" we always called him. Ask any one who knew Rangoon in those days and they'll say the same thing: "Splendid job old Pipeye did." Ten minutes it used to take, but things have changed a lot since then. I haven't been near North Africa for years so I can't say. And what do you think I found when I got there? I don't expect you'll guess, very few do, so I'll tell you. There, lying on the floor of the Tramcar was a brace of Wild Duck!



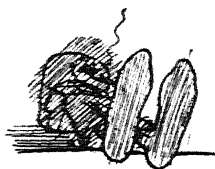
### THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

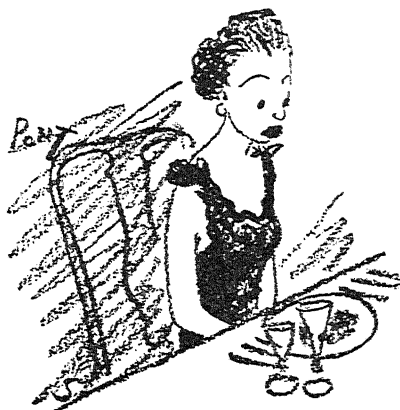
FONDNESS FOR LAUGHING AT OUR OWN ANECDOTES.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
PARTIALITY FOR OPEN FIRES.

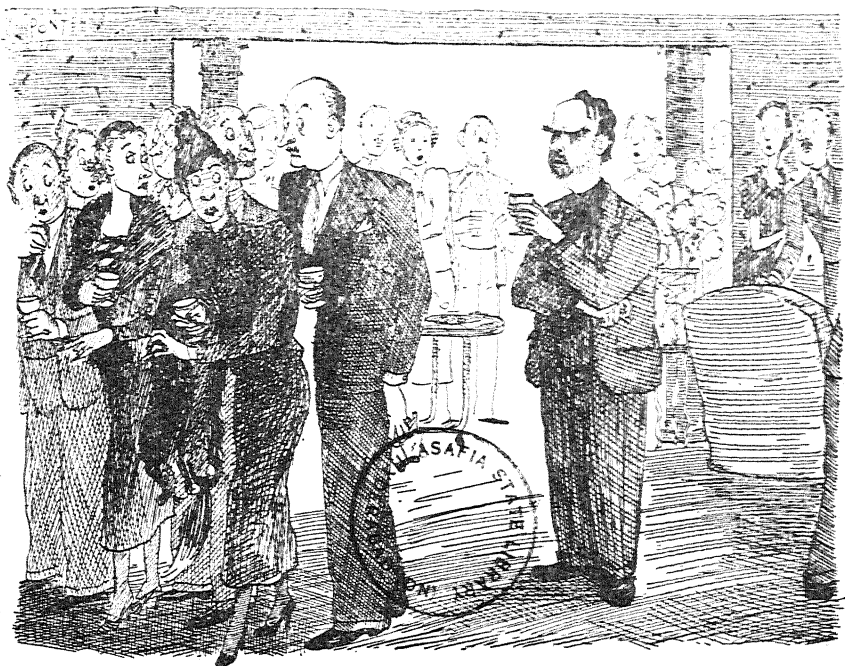




*"Gosh! Quails in Aspic again."*

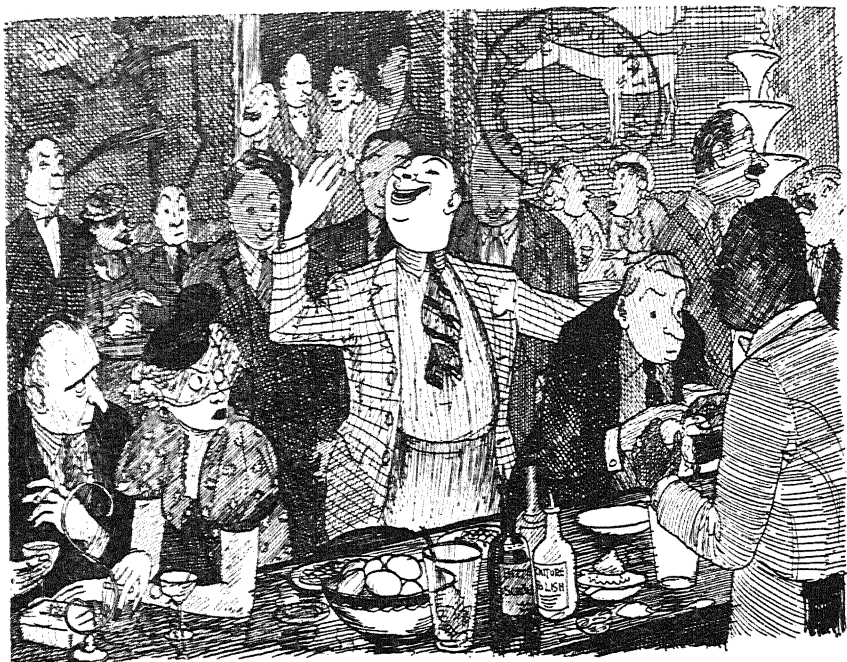


*"Tell me, are you a believer in elemental disproportion or de-energised statics, or do you just stick to the Propkoffer theory?"*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF NOT BEING INTELLECTUAL.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
A TENDENCY TO BE HEARTY.

## RURAL



*"Precisely the same as they said about poor Frederic, my dear, and he scarcely lasted the week."*





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
EXTRAORDINARY PROPENSITY OF THE FARMERS TO GRUMBLE.





*"He says it's not for sale, my lord."*

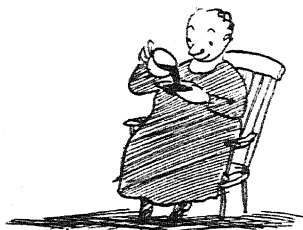


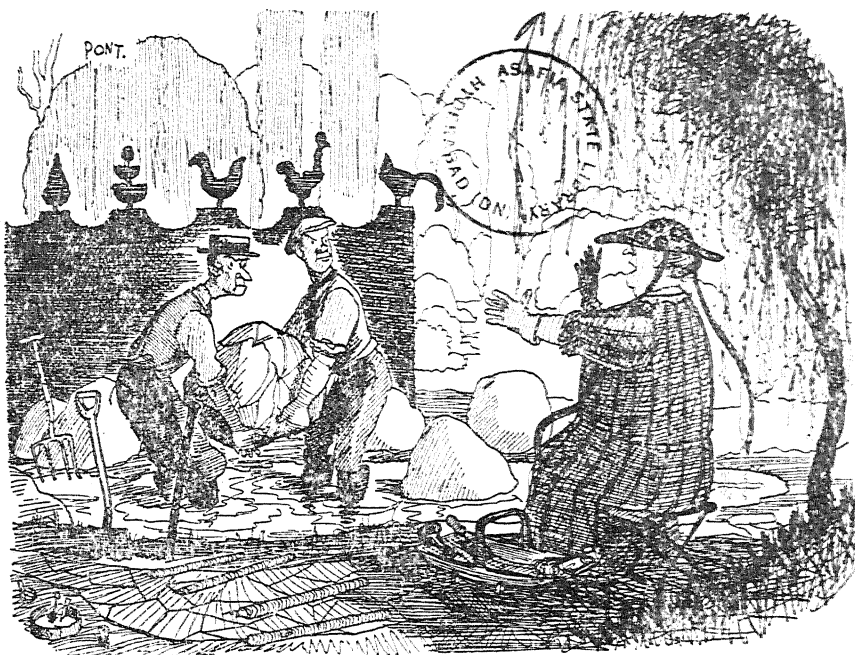
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
DETERMINATION NOT TO PRESERVE THE RURAL AMENITIES.



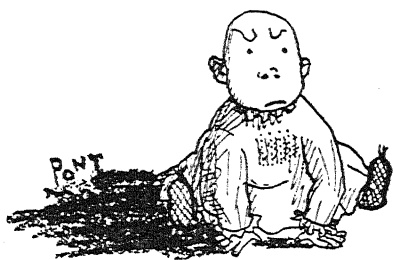


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF TEA.

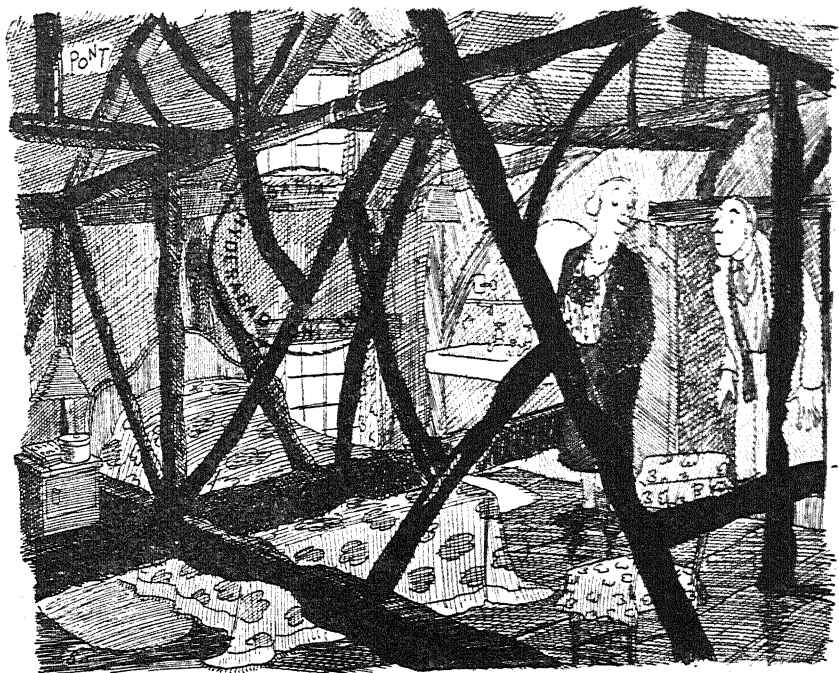




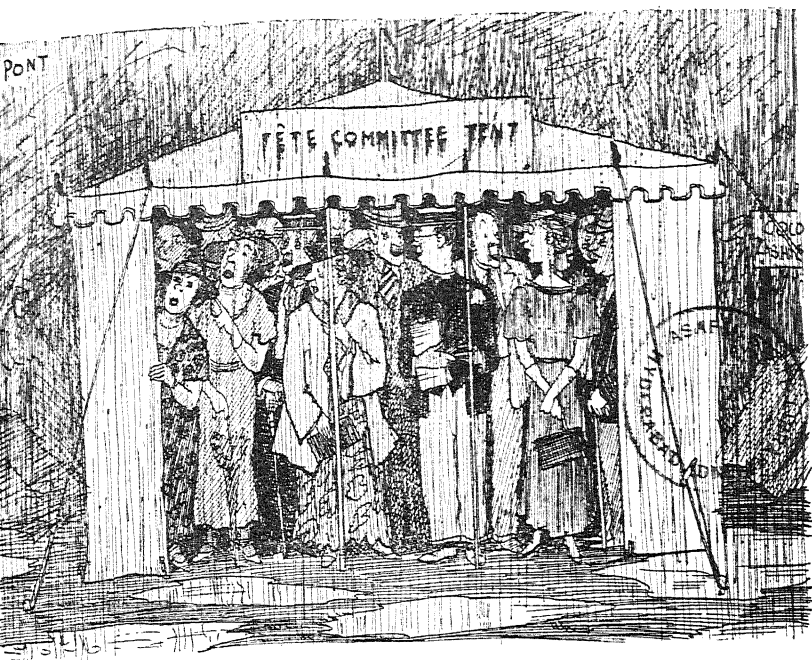
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ENTHUSIASM FOR GARDENING.



*"Look who's come to see baby!"*



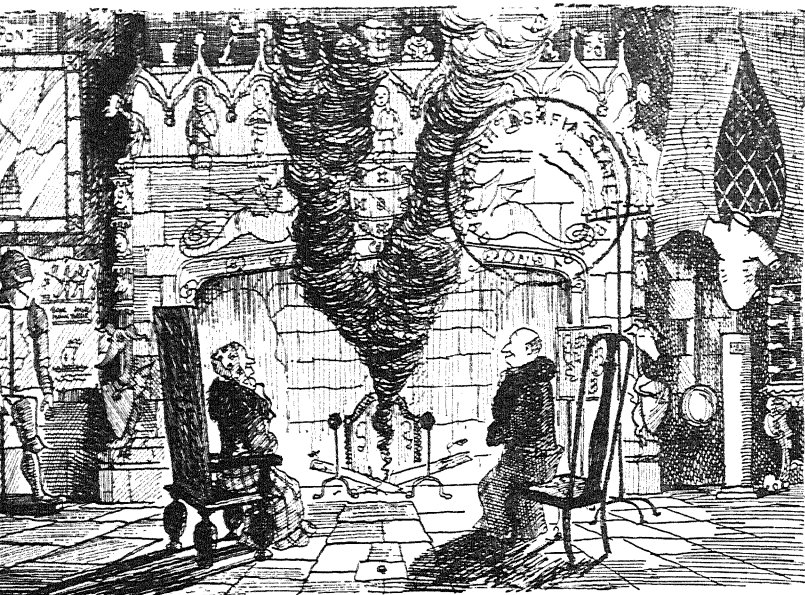
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
A WEAKNESS FOR OAK BEAMS.



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
KEEN INTEREST IN THE WEATHER.







THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
PASSION FOR THE ANTIQUE.

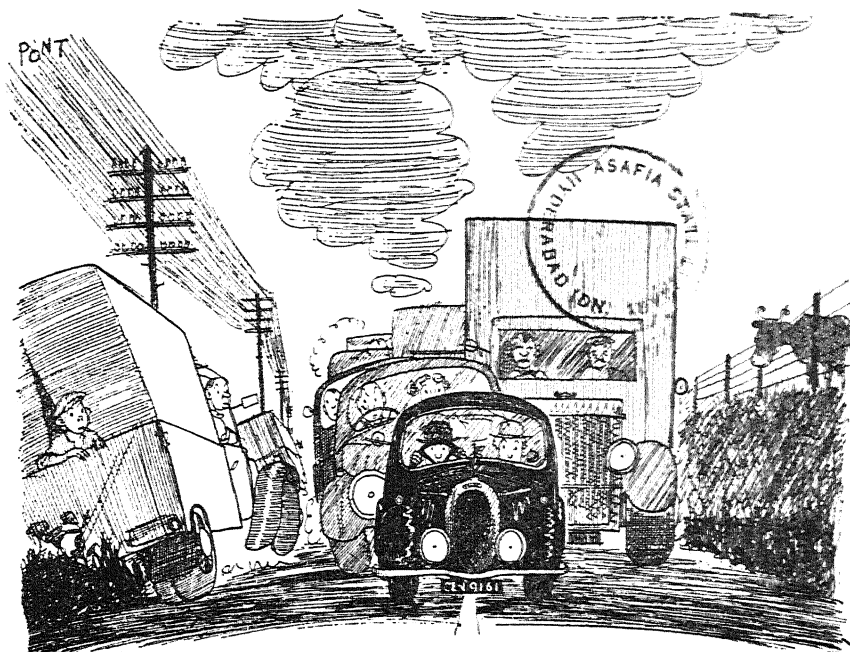
## TRAVEL



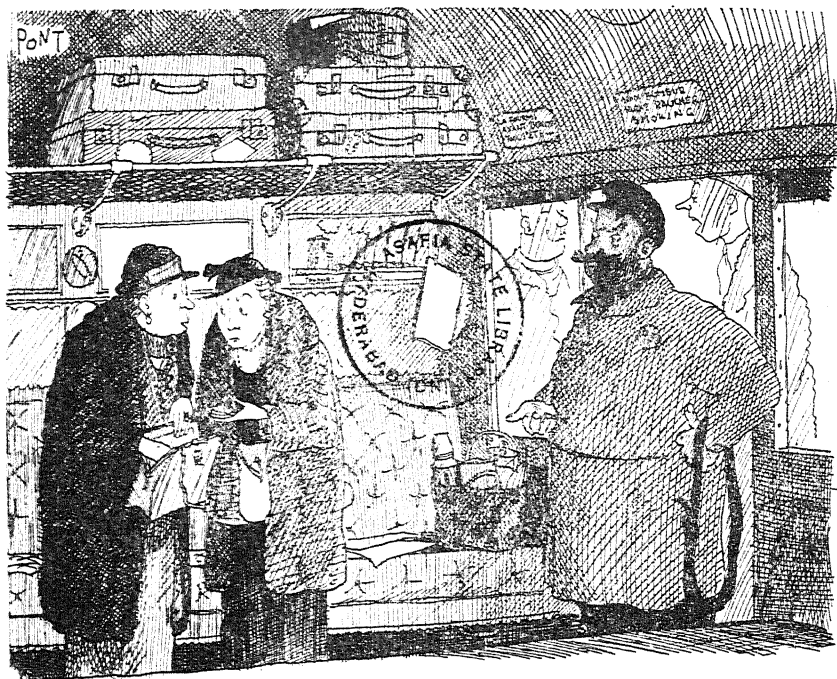
*"When I was a young man I wasn't  
perpetually rushing about in motor cars."*



*"And do I have to keep on holding this?"*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
PREFERENCE FOR DRIVING ON THE CROWN OF THE ROAD.

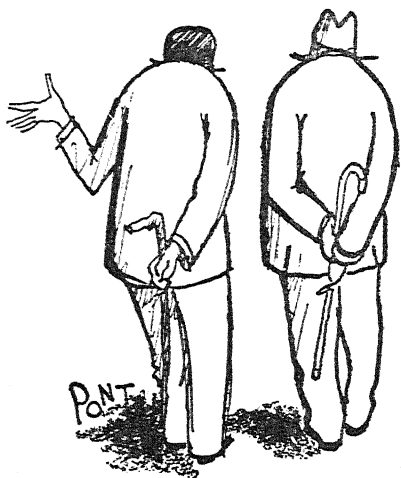


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
TENDENCY TO BE EMBARRASSED BY FOREIGN CURRENCIES.



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

FONDNESS FOR TRAVEL.



*"The fact is, my dear fellow—and you may as well admit it—we're not so young as we were forty years ago."*

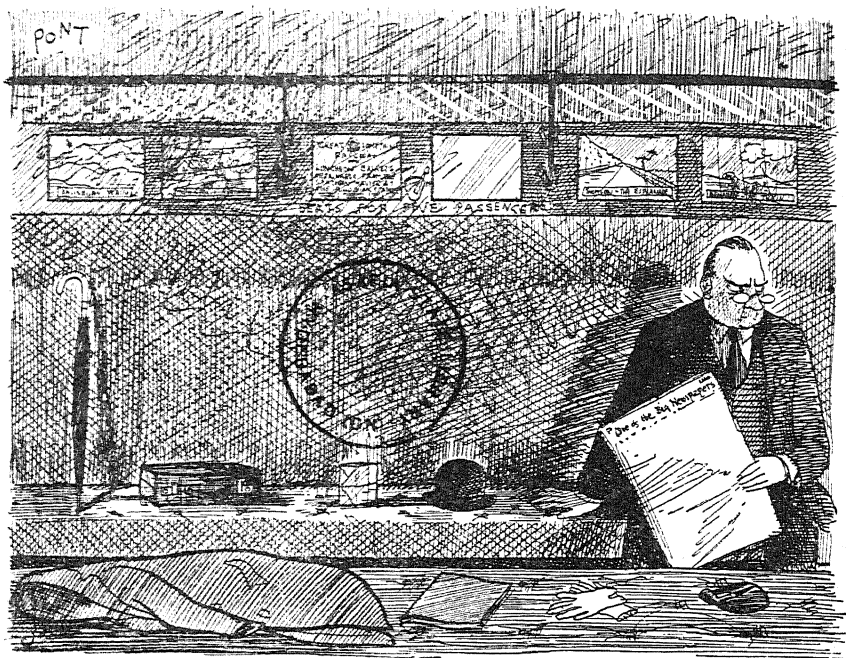


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

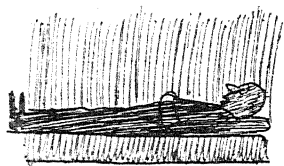
RESERVE.

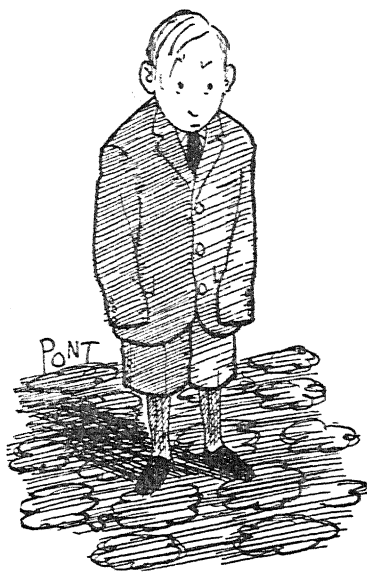




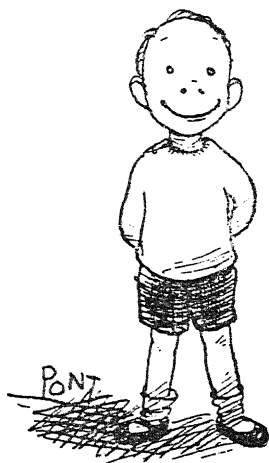


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF TRAVELLING ALONE.





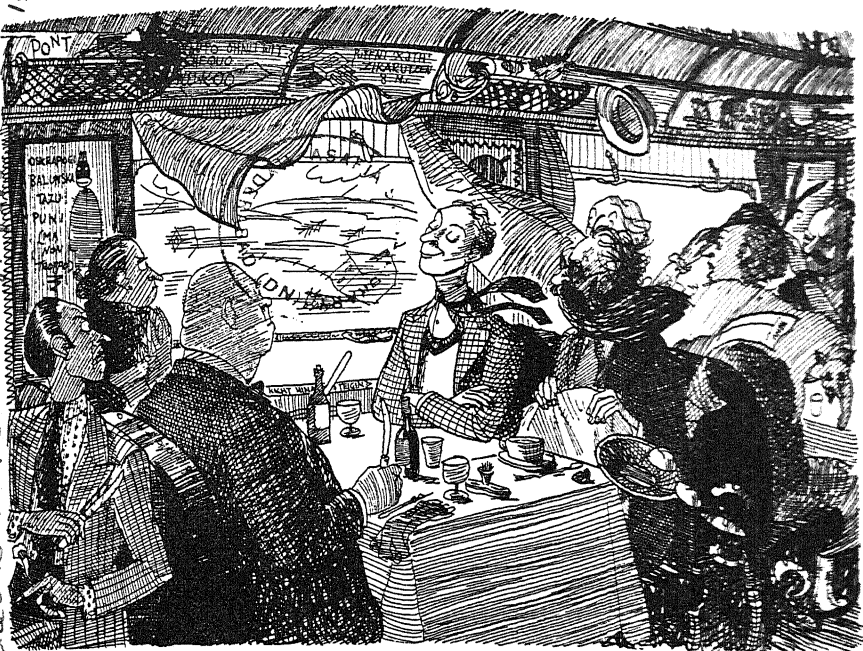
*"Don't be so silly, darling. Would Mother be likely to say it did if it didn't?"*



*"And now Mother's very cross indeed  
with you!"*

Acc. No. 15118

The British Character Studied & Revealed by P. B. St. John

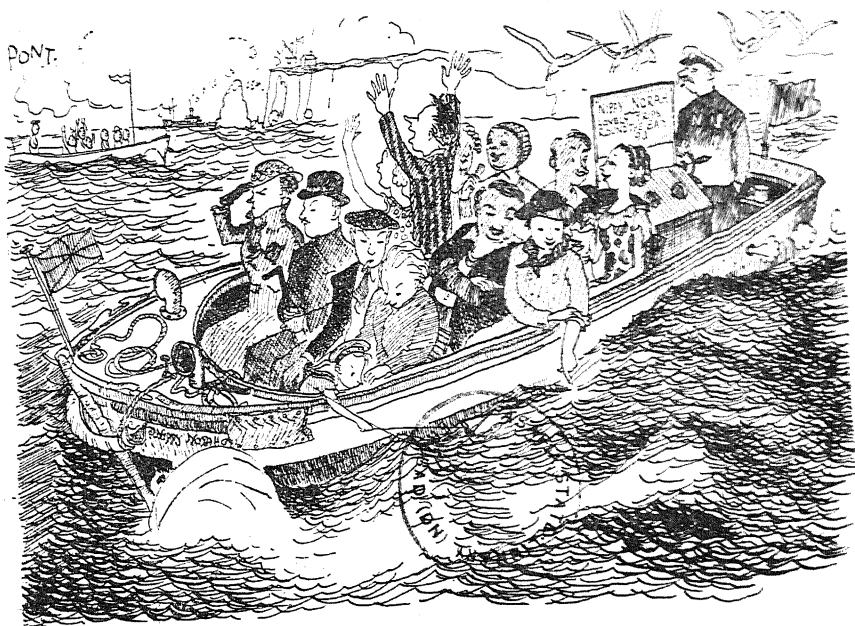


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS FRESH AIR.



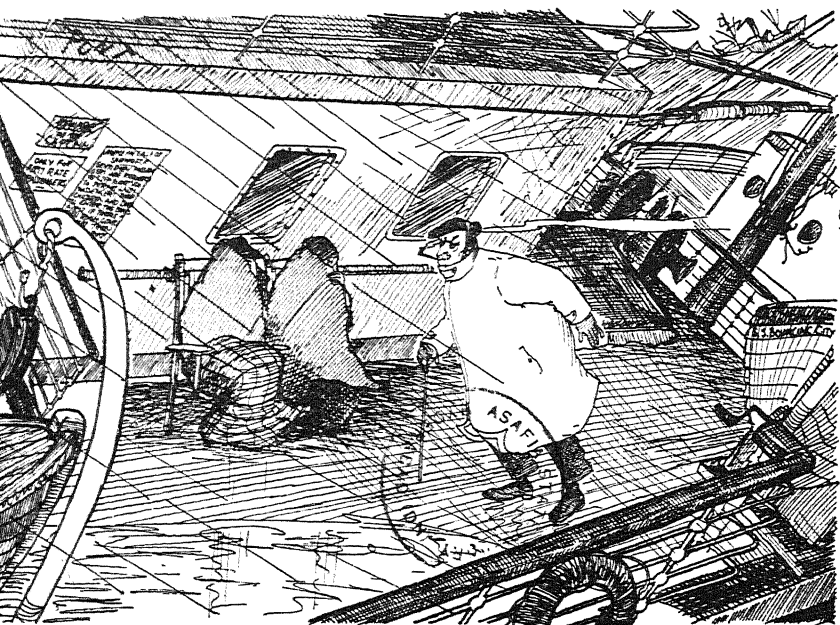


*"No, you can't marry Greta Garbo until you grow up, so stop being a baby about it."*

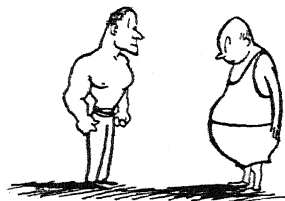


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
THE SEA SENSE.

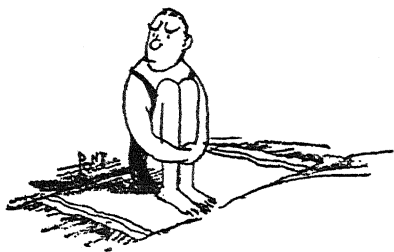




THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE.



## SPORT

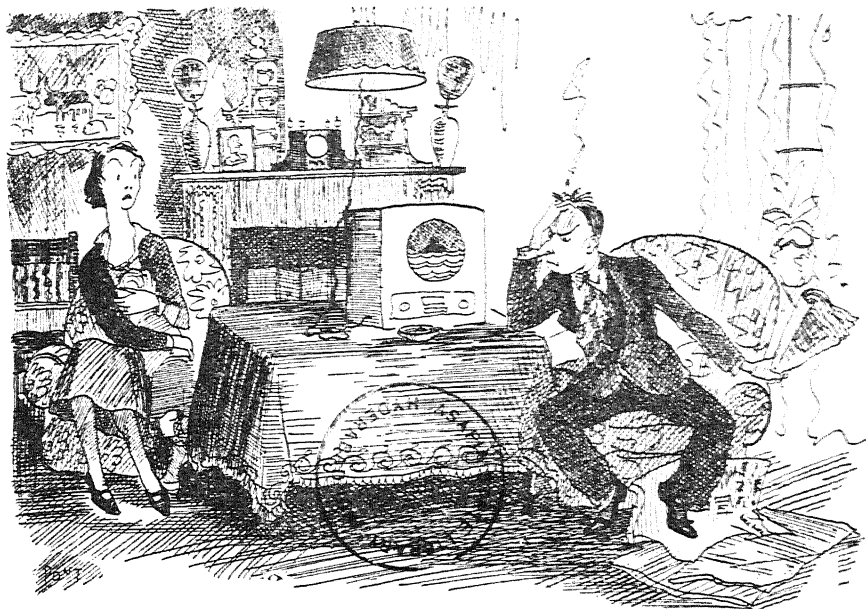


*"Come on, every one, let's have a race out  
to the raft."*

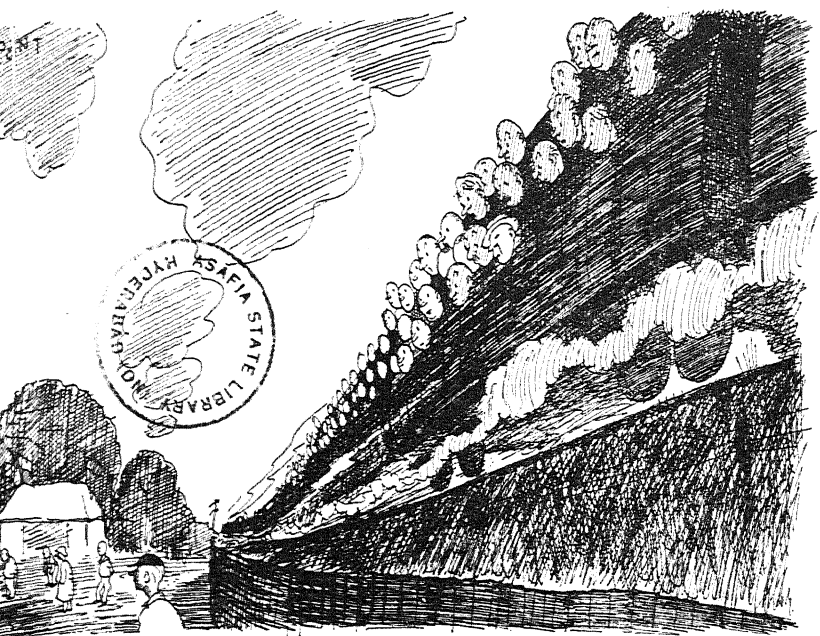




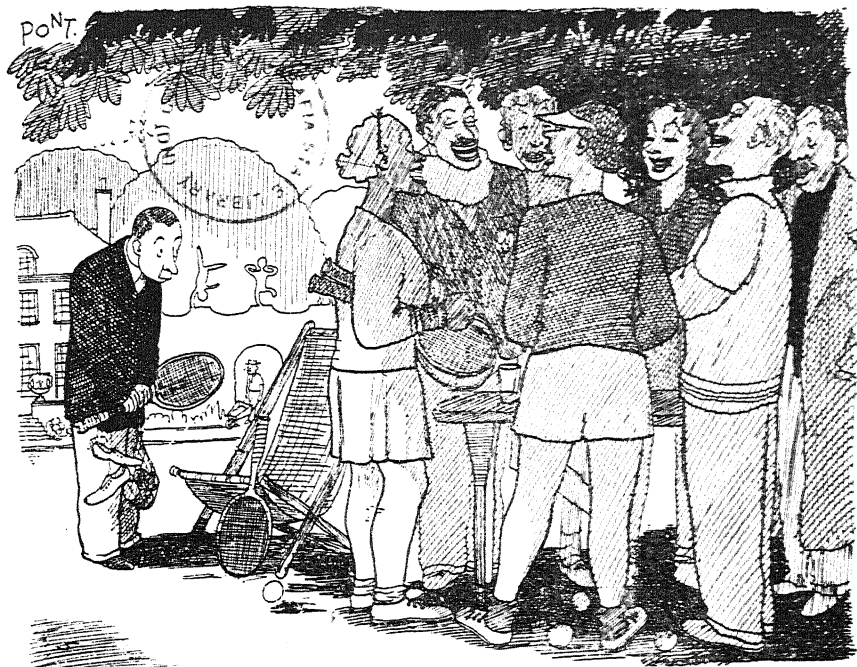
*"It seems ridiculous that by this time nobody  
has thought of an easier way to do these."*



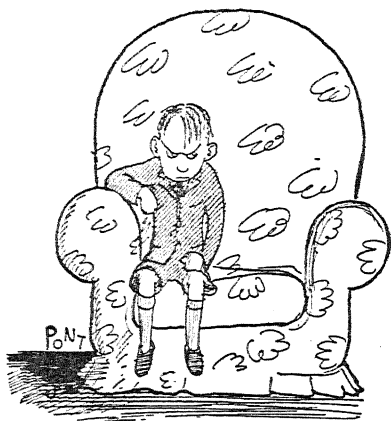
THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF OPEN-AIR SPORTS.



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
FONDNESS FOR CRICKET.



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
IMPORTANCE OF BEING ATHLETIC.



*"I wonder if there's a really nice little boy in the room who would like to run upstairs and look for Mummy's spectacles."*



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
INDISPENSABILITY OF GOLF.



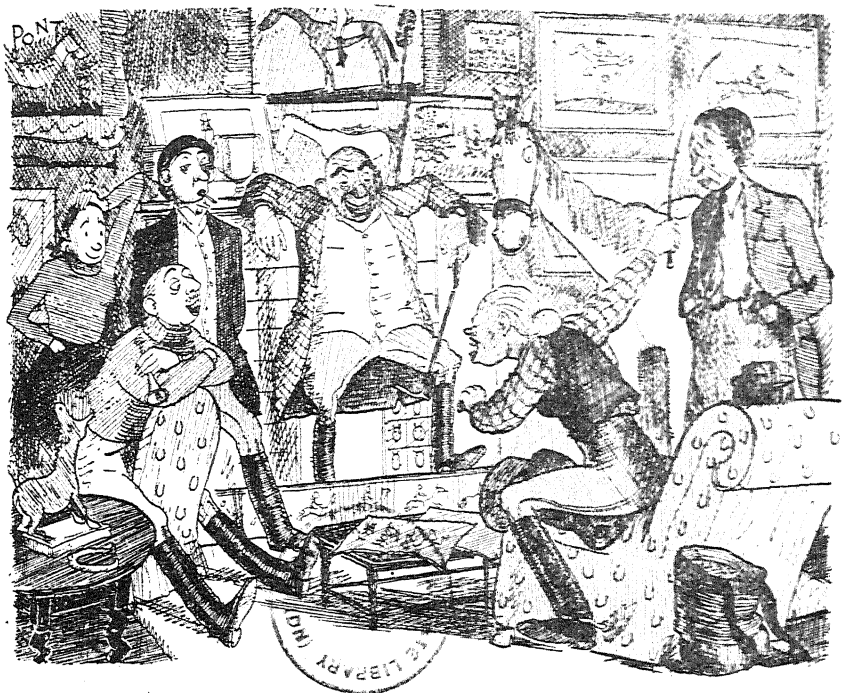


THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
LOVE OF GAMES.





THE BRITISH CHARACTER.  
ENTHUSIASM FOR HUNTING.



THE BRITISH CHARACTER.

LOVE OF BEING HORSEY.

